September 8, 2013 / Will Cardwell

## Faith and Technology

Luke 14:33 - So, therefore none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions

Today, I want to talk about my favorite things: the amazing high tech devices and systems I enjoy. But wait, this is not the place for that! This is our church community. This is where you get confronted with stark demands like we have in the Luke reading today: "So, therefore none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions". I enjoy my possessions, like this iPod. I don't want to give them up.

But again this community- It's where I met Dolly in 1954, and where we raised our children. It's where I was a camp counselor, where my son met his wife, a place of grounding, spiritual and otherwise for our family. This I a place where I have mowed the ball field and crawled through the church attic doing electrical work. I ran that computer cable over there by the window that carries the internet to the upper floor.

A community that God has called together like ours is where we can stand in the middle- between the material things we like and the call of God who loves us and asks us to let go of those possessions as well as the afflicting emotions that separate us from God and other people. We make progress when we give over to meditation and contemplative prayer, when we are mindful, let go and let God as Bert Fisher reminded us at our Bible Study

Wednesday. Our *Disciplines or Covenant One With Another* is a specific commitment to take those daily steps that can help us loosen our clutch on our possessions little by little.

Faith and Technology - Faith is what is absolutely primary here. Technology is a relatively small matter in the long run, we say, but potentially is a great force for good, when rightly used to facilitate the common good. But you don't need to be able to use today's technology to be close to God and live in a Community of Faith, for today's "stuff" can easily distract us from community. So we celebrate those who really don't want to rely on high technology. They focus on how their particular gifts fit into the call to the inward and outward journey.

But having said that, isn't email amazing... when it works like you want it to?
... and the Internet that carries the email everywhere you want it to go in an instant? ... and word processing and spreadsheets ... and cut and paste? ... and undo? These marvels made writing this sermon so much easier, as hard as it was. I'm not so much into Facebook yet ... but I know how wonderful it is in balance to so many.

And then there is also Google. Whatever you want to know seems to be there, accessible using Google. Our church website is amazing. It was built by Mike Hickcox who just appeared right on time, with a perfectly matched gift to share. Just as you and I share our gifts ... not just so called productive gifts but gifts of being the person you are. But, back to the website- After this

service, in the Lodge on our big TV screen, I want to give you a tour of the church's amazing web site found on the web at "chcov.org". Our church web site communicates to the world – can you believe it? chcov.org is unique in the whole world as to where anyone on the Internet can see and hear who we uniquely are- The Church of the Covenant of Lynchburg, Virginia. Maybe tomorrow or 10 years from now, someone in Beijing China or Bismarck, North Dakota will Google us, and subsequently join us. This could turn out to be life changing for them and for us. Our web presence is dynamic – because Mike keeps it up to date with current happenings - yet recorded and backed up in cyberspace as permanently as possible.

Speaking to those who aren't able to use computers or smart phones or ipads for some reason, <u>but want to</u>, I want you to know that I want to be available to help you in any way. We can try to be realistic and learn at your pace. We can avoid the hazards and bad things that come with technology. On that subject, I would like to introduce the words of Paul Jesep, a Bishop in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and author of the book "Lost Sense of Self & the Ethics Crisis". He observes this:

"Technology has consumed, influenced, and manipulated humankind like never before. Smart phones are a constant companion whether in the bedroom, watching television, or a short trip to the corner store. Individuals have made technology an extension of their person. It can empower, but also dehumanize and emotionally disconnect people."

"Religion is an invitation to stillness", he says. "It uses metaphors, a universal language speaking to a deeper part of one's identity. "...The challenge for spiritual leaders is to re-create a modern means to communicate [the metaphors and wisdom of world religions] to the notebook and smart phone generation".

Finally I quote this from Paul Jesep: "Today, religion can be a safeguard to maintain our humanity and sense of community when ease or complacency seeks to replace human interaction with social media. Religion, if not abused, still calls us to an intuitive, inherent spirituality in the quest for meaning and relevance."

"Religion is an invitation to stillness." I like that as a way to start addressing the radical call in today's gospel reading. As Thomas Keating would say, through centering prayer, we can deal with our afflicting emotions, dismantle our emotional programs for happiness, and let go of possessions and emotions that afflict us.

I grew up tinkering with mechanical and electrical things, forerunning my career with computers and technology. But I also grew up in the Christian Faith. Both of these influenced the direction of my life. I was born within a mile of here and all six members of our family were faithful members of Inglewood Baptist Church, which is also nearby. However beginning at age nine, Jack and Bev Cosby became my main mentors in the Faith.

My oldest brother Bennett was my mentor as a Mechanical Engineer. I

wanted to be an engineer too. After all, people said I could fix anything, I made go carts and stayed greasy working on bicycles and lawn mowers and engines. My father was good at this also and taught me a lot. As a hobby, he made a power saw and a drill press out of an old sewing machine. He even fixed radios and later, TVs. I was a hero in fourth grade when I so easily fixed the teacher's record player when she was planning to take it to the repair shop. In high school, I worked on Saturdays at Sears fixing lawn mowers. I learned to do picture framing and worked after school doing this at J. P. Bell Studio on Main Street.

Jack and Bev encouraged me to be involved with the LCF Boys groups and later in the Wednesday night church services here, although I was still a member of Inglewood Baptist. I was enjoying becoming a leader of youth programs. Also, my mother had natural musical abilities which carried over to me; I sang in the Inglewood church choir and sang in harmony with my high school buddies.

I was headed toward two different kinds of career paths: Engineering, or a more human contact path. At the end of High School in 1956, I had not decided between VA Tech and Lynchburg College for further education. My brother Bennett tried to sell me on going to Tech and become an Engineer as he had done. I wanted that status of being an engineer but I was attached to my hometown and the security of Lynchburg friends, and excitement of being around Jack and Bev and their refreshing concepts and vision for the Church. If I went to Tech I would be obliged to join the ROTC and serve time in the

military as my brothers had done, but I didn't want to do that.

Staying in Lynchburg as an LC day student was the safer, more secure thing for me. I could take pre-engineering, continue with the church, sing in the well-known LC touring choir, and maybe transfer to Tech later. Also, I could continue working part-time at Sears and J. P. Bell.

I chose staying in Lynchburg, and continued studying at Lynchburg College for the full four years. The greatest thing that happened was that I had met Dolly here in 1955. I got to know her better at the Wednesday night School for Christian Living, and on Sunday afternoons after church during my freshman year. You can see why this made life better and better and began confirming how providential was my choice to stay in Lynchburg. In November 1959, my senior year, Dolly amazingly agreed to marry me. I joined this church becoming a Covenant Member with her that same year. I graduated from LC with a BS degree in the summer of 1960.

Encouraged by Bev and Jack, I was a good church and Day Camp youth leader, and Lynchburg Public Schools needed a Junior High Math teacher. So I taught at R. E. Lee four years, and during that time Will Jr. was born in 1963. We moved to Knoxville for a year in 1964 where I earned a Masters in Math at U of Tennessee. I then taught Math at E. C. Glass for two years but decided to join my brother at B&W in 1966 where there was a need for scientific and engineering programmers. Being offered such a fascinating job in this field was so self-affirming so I took the job. Ben was born in 1967,

and I stayed at B&W in various technology capacities until I was early retired in 1993. After that I worked at Benchmark Systems, then Ericsson, then IBM where I retired again for real in 2008.

So you see some of what has influenced me, intrigued me, and brought me here. I am so grateful to all of you and to the hundreds of people who have shaped this church over many years. It will be fun for me to show and tell you about the things that this Faith Community has been the setting for in my life and hear your take on all of these things. This is a community that allows such expressions of our callings and continues to nurture Dolly and me as we express ourselves now in our retirement years. Thank you again and may God bless each of you as we journey together.